

Teddies, Ponies, and Marines

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Summary: Thirty-one years after the Great War, Humanity is yet again attacked by an alien species. And as a child, Jane Shepard witnessed it from the beginning. She saw the bodies in the blood covered snow at the age of nine. All she ever wanted was a pony, an e-reader, and her teddy. M for lots of death, I guess, and the inevitable future romance.

Teddies, Ponies, and Marines

****Shanxi****

Jane was asleep. She was enjoying a nice dream. She wouldn't ever remember it again, but she had a lot of fun while it lasted. Something about Unicorns, and then another dream about getting a fancy new FANNET, a new e-reader that she wanted for her birthday. Most people would have thought it odd that she dreamt about Unicorns. She was nine after all. But Jane wasn't a normal kid. She had never let go of pink things and happy things, yet loved to read stories, and write some, in hindsight, very poor ones too.

She clung to a teddy bear as she slept. She was also drooling rather unceremoniously, but she would just wipe it away in the morning and forget about it. But that night, there was no morning after. Only red snow.

* * *

><p>She was awoken with a jolt on her shoulders, and looked up to see her mum standing above her. "Jane, get up! We gotta go!" Jane was confused as to what mum meant. She looked around unaware of anything, and saw that it was still four-thirty-seven PM on her alarm clock.<p>

She let out a groan. "Ugh, it's not school yet. I don' wanna ge-" Jane was interrupted as a massive shudder and explosion could be felt

and heard, and the light from it lit up the inside of her room through the window. Her mum grabbed her hand and pulled Jane out of the bed, still in her PJ's and with Charlie in hand. She had got the bear from her dad when he worked in the SWAT force, and it had apparently been found in a raid, belonging to a little girl. She had felt bad that the girl didn't have a teddy anymore, but her dad explained that it was something to do with Jane "remembering this girl and her teddy."

She didn't know what that had meant then, but she had a good idea now. Of course, that wasn't what mattered now. The explosion, for what else could it have been, shook the house and her bones, and had her wide awake, being dragged along by her mum. No doubt dad was already out there, with his detective friends stopping the baddies. Although, she wasn't sure if police detectives, officers, and some SWAT were equipped to take on rebels, or the Covenant, if the worst came true. And it usually did. Not a nice lesson for a kid not out of single digits to learn, but one that had become necessary after the Great War.

She was dragged into the hallway, where her mum stopped and put Jane's shoes and jacket on and then got herself ready. As they were about to leave, her mum realised she forgot her phone and ran to the table to get it. She had a feeling it was already announced. Before opening the door, she unlocked it and instantly went to inter-colonial news, where news from the entirety of the colonies could be read. Of course, front page news read: Breaking News - WINTER CONTINGENCY declared on Shanxi. She shoved the phone into her pocket and grabbed Jane by the hand. She looked down at her. "Hold my hand, tight. Don't let go or I might lose you." She was about to turn the door handle again when she stopped her hand in the air, and told Jane "I love you, sweetie-pie."

She opened the door, and none of the old helmet-cam feeds or films prepared Jane for what she saw.

There were people running frantically down the road, some cars trying to speed down it but having to stop due to the masses of people. Everyone was covered in snow, and looked about as ill equipped as Jane was. A few miles in the distanced, she could see New Gotham on fire, with skyscrapers and massive holes in them, AA fire sweeping through the air from the local garrison, shooting at what were most likely Seraphs that couldn't be seen from this distance.

A chill went up Jane's spine as she and her mum were hit hard by the snow, their painfully inadequate clothes doing nothing to protect their bodies from the cold. They began to move forward, with the crowds towards, well, wherever. Neither of them knew, but they followed like Humans always did.

As they continued on, Jane couldn't help but stare at the city. It was strangely pretty. Like a whole world was illuminated in shiny red light, one she rarely saw up close in a suburban neighbourhood like hers. And then she felt bad. She was thinking about how pretty it was when she forgot the one thing she should have been remembering. Her dad was down there.

* * *

><p>Robert ducked his head as more of those strange weapons fired

above his cover. They weren't energy weapons, though from the few he had seen scattered around corpses, they weren't quite projectile either. And certainly not Covenant.<p>

"Incoming!" somebody shouted. There was a brief pause and an explosion tore a piece of wall out a few metres away. The building they were taking cover in was an administrative office, not a skyscraper of military base. It was going to give way soon, and if they didn't leave now, the more chance there was that they'd be in it when it finally collapsed.

He open a radio channel to the rest of his squad. "Alright, here's the plan. Last order we received was to fall back to NGPDHQ. But the entirety of eleventh avenue is being shelled to kingdom come. That leaves only indirect and underground. We're seven blocks from it, but that could be more based on damage caused and route alteration on aboveground." Another burst hit the wall only feet away this time. "How we doing for underground, Larz?"

A marine in standard winter fatigues was hiding behind a support column. He was barely twenty and he was seeing his home get hit. "Egh, I haven't got anything from command. But these guys seem to employ more reasonable tactics than '_go forward_', so I'd say that they will have probably figured out that we can use underground. I wouldn't suggest it." It was common knowledge that the main Covenant forces in the war, and even after, had employed a tactic, hell, even strategy, that had been dubbed '_Go forward_'. It was all the Covenant had ever really needed to do before they encountered Humanity, and it even worked well on them, but Humans didn't fight like Grunts or Jackals. Humans were unpredictable.

"Sound thoughts," another marine chimed in.

It was as good as Robert and his team would get. "Alright, streets are as good as it's gonna get. Epsi, lay down suppressive with your LMG and we'll get out and then cover you and the last person."

The marine, a middle aged woman called Maron Epsi, sighed. "Why do I always get the good jobs?" She slinked up beside Robert, and cocked her LMG. "Ready when you are, sir."

He nodded. He brought his BR to bear, and sensing what he would do, Epsi rolled across the wall until she was opposite him. "On my mark, start shooting." He waited three seconds. "Mark!" He bashed a crumbling bit of wall and it collapsed. Epsi jumped up to it and began wildly firing her LMG at where the enemy was, and it worked. Unlike the Covenant, these guys ducked. Robert and the rest of the squad ran through the building with only some shots being fired at them. They reached the outside air, and Roberts remembered just how cold it was. Shanxi winter was brutal, even for winter armour wearing soldiers. They set up behind a barrier that blocked the road, courtesy of the city Superintendent, who still had control.

He put his hand to his ear when only Epsi and another marine were inside. "You two, we're covering, go!" He heard the LMG stop firing, and him and the marines outside began wildly firing hoping to keep the enemy down. It worked, but another one of the squad was hit in the neck, most likely severing the spine, killing the marine in an instant. At least it was fast. _The civilian bodies littering the street had it fast too though. Doesn't mean it's good_. "Somebody

grab his tags."

Espi and the other marine suddenly rushed out of the building, taking cover with the dwindling squad. "Sir, they got a tank!" the other marine exclaimed. His name was Jeremy, and he had a very strong Australian accent.

"A tank, what kind?"

"I have no clue. It looks like a Scorpion and a Warthog had an illegitimate love child, and somebody stuck jetpacks on said child."

"Jetpacks?" Robert asked questioningly.

"Yeah, it was like, jumping over shit. I suggest we get going before that thing turns a corner and takes a liking to our asses." Espi always had that way with her words. "Sir."

"Alright then. Prepare for CQC. We're going to go through buildings. I don't want to be on the street in these conditions. I can barely see even with night vision." To be honest, going through buildings was just as dangerous as the streets. Low maneuverability, possibility of power cuts, tripping over bodies, it collapsing on them. But the squad needed some form of hope. What hope there was, Robert couldn't know. He even doubted that the NGPDHQ was still up. But it was all they could do. All the civies in the city were dead or hiding, or in the glassing bunkers. At that thought though, he spoke to the team again.

"If you see any survivors, they become immediate priority. Understood?" He got a series of static response which were simple "yes'" in radio. "Alright. That street over there, fifth on second, run to it on my mark." Another three second pause. "Mark."

They all ran from the barrier across the body filled road and into the darkened area beyond, all making it despite the hail of gunfire coming their way. _It's gonna be one hell of a fight_.

* * *

><p>The street was on fire. Explosions went off everywhere, lighting the darkened streets. Bodies littered the ground, charred, burnt, mangled, some still alive, crying for help, while people ran by or over, screaming in frenzied panic. Cars exploded here and there from sustained damage. Hell was a holiday compared to the things Jane was seeing now.<p>

Her mum still had a firm hold on her hand, so tight Jane thought their hands might be frozen together due to the cold and snow. Overhead was a large warship, roughly six-hundred metres in length, and it had large cannons that were firing down to the ground. Whatever it was though, it wasn't Covenant. It was sleek yet menacing and a dark grey colour with some blue, not purple, and they didn't have plasma. More like normal UNSC ships. And she knew it wasn't rebels. Rebels were bad people as she had been taught, but she also knew that rebels didn't attack civilians after the Great War.

As the two of them ran away from the ship with the rest of the crowd, a tremendous screech could be heard, and all of a sudden four

Longswords flew overhead, faster than Jane could see, and fired missiles at the ship. The ship wasn't taken down, but began to concentrate on the fighters overhead. To do that, it had to turn it's main gun battery away from the crowd. The engines could be heard flaring to life as the frigate sized ship turned to face the fighters.

This time, it was prepared. It fired a series of AA guns, and two of the massive jets were hit. One exploded mid air, but the other managed to steer itself into the ship despite it's damage. In the largest explosion Jane heard that night, everyone got to the ground as the jet's twin fusion engines exploded and shook the ground so hard that a building could be heard collapsing nearby. Everybody got up the moment the shaking was over, and began running again. Jane could barely feel her legs at that point.

Suddenly, the jets could be heard again, though Jane didn't dare to look back. A series of explosions went off again, though not as big as the previous one. Her curiosity got the better of her, and she looked back to see the warship with three very large holes in it. One was bigger than the others, so that must have been the engines of the jet and it must've brought down the shields, and the other jets made a run on it.

The ship started to rise up and above the city. Jane turned forward again and kept running. The people around her were constantly bashing into her, though due to everyone's winter jackets it wasn't too uncomfortable. She felt her hand grow cool, and stopped dead in her tracks, almost being knocked over. People still got out of the way of a little girl.

Her hand was empty. No mum was holding it. Charlie was still in the other hand. But the cool grip of her mum's was gone. She was still being bashed about, so she got out of the way and into an alley. She found a box to sit on, and just stared at her hand. It was empty. She was panicking. Where was her mum? Was she dead? Did she go on thinking Jane had too? No. If Jane had been left then her mum would have stayed behind to look for her. Jane wanted to go get up, and go looking for her mum, but she couldn't will herself to do it. She just lowered her hands and stared at her shoes.

Despite the cold that was freezing her, she still felt hot tears come to her eyes and sting them. Even as the first light rose over the skyscrapers and peoples screaming died down slowly, as the crown finally passed on, she just sat and cried. She didn't know how long she cried for. All she knew was that when she did stop it was considerably brighter, and the snow had dumbbed down.

She cleared her eyes and sniffled for the umpteenth time, and slowly picked herself out of shock. She got up despite the pains and aches from her legs, which hadn't moved for hours. She was afraid she had hypothermia now that she had been cold for so long. She still clutched to her teddy bear.

As she saw the street, she stopped and struggled to breath, staring at the sight in front of her. The road and pavements were covered in bodies and snow, so many so that it looked like a picture of a Russian battlefield from Earth's second World War, and not like peaceful Shanxi. The street was devoid of any life. High above her, in a forty story building, a Falcon was embedded in the buildings

structure, marine bodies slumping out of the troop compartment. The snow had removed any remaining fires.

About twenty metres away she saw a huge chunk of metal, apparently a piece of the aliens ship. All down the street, where there had been signs reading _Evacuation this way_, the boards had all reverted to the emergency broadcast system, and a red band over it with the white block capital words WINTER CONTINGENCY. It was a phrase that many, including her dad, had learned to fear in childhood. Her dad. _Her dad!_ If she could reach the PDHQ, he would likely be there assisting with the evacuations, and they could go find mom in the downtown evac center, where they were headed but a few hours ago, then they could leave.

The plan, in her eyes, was foolproof. There were only two problems. Getting there without freezing to death in her PJ's, and getting there without being shot to death. She wanted to believe the aliens were above it, but from the sight in front of her, she could tell they weren't. She began to cry at the thought of her death. She thought it was selfish, but she also couldn't help it. She hugged Charlie to her face as tight as she could, imagining it as her mother for comfort. She felt her legs go numb again, and knew she would have to find better clothes. She wasn't going to get them off of bodies though.

She began to walk, careful to avoid the corpses, down the long, straight street, until she reached a considerably large off branching road, with more bodies under snow. She looked at the shops, and saw that the windows had been destroyed either from shockwaves or the actual rounds, she didn't know. She continued down the road, until she came across a clothes shop, the only one she had seen so far. It wasn't big, but it was larger than a small outlet, so there was a good chance there were clothes for her size. She was pretty short for a nine-year-old.

She walked in, suddenly aware that what she was doing would be considered looting. Not that anyone could care less about it now. And it was her survival, not the need for money for that dream pony that drove her to steal.

Dad had always said one thing about the looters in riots and attacks. "_They're opportunists, and they can be pretty crafty. But they're also big fools_." And right now, Jane was a fool. She heard a gun cock, and jumped in place, and then froze when she hit the ground.

She wasn't sure what to do. Whoever it was already knew she was here. Should she announce herself? If it was an alien, it probably would've killed her by now. She didn't know what to do so she very weakly asked the air in front of her "Hello? Is anyone there?"

She heard a rustling, of what sounded like cloth, and a marine walked out from behind a freestanding mirror. He let out a sigh. "Crikey," he said in a heavy Australian accent, "Thought you were one of those aliens son's of bitches. Ehh, I mean, just aliens. Not SOB's."

"Real smooth," another marine announced, a woman who just clambered over the counter. "You gonna tell her santa isn't real next?"

"He's not? Why would you tell me that?" Jane let out a small laugh.

The marine was funny.

"Because, asswipe, you need a reality check." Jane didn't really mind swearing, but there were some words she would never use, either because they were too silly, or they would make people feel very bad. Not that she ever used them. Dad did though. She let out a shiver as a sudden cold wave went up her spine.

The woman noticed and walked to Jane, removing her helmet. She got to one knee, and held out her hand. The woman was very beautiful, not more than mid-twenties, Asian, and had piercing green eyes, with hair cut to the six-inch regulation for women. "You don't look so good, baby. You must be freezing, right?" Jane nodded desperately. "Come on, let's go get you some clothes. Jeremy, keep watch here, and don't try on any underwear. My name's Maron Espi, by the way, but you can just call me Espi."

"I'm Jane"

Espi nodded, and proceeded to go pick new clothes out with Jane.

They had a bit of trouble, some of Jane's clothes had shrunk due to the moisture, but after fifteen minutes she finally had new, warm clothes. The jacket was much thicker, with fake fur lining the hood, wrists, bottom, and inside. Her trousers were grey, and padded on the inside with extra material, and she now had a jumper and shirt on underneath. She got a pair of high quality winter boots, though they were a size too big, and black, which worked against them in terms of camouflage. She also got new white and black gloves, and to top it all off, a pair of snowboarding goggles for if the snow turned to blizzard. By the time the two of them were done, Jane was working up a sweat.

Espi looked down at her and commented "Man, you got better gear than us now." She sighed and patted the large machine gun at her side, hanging by a thick belt over her shoulder. "You headed anywhere, any family?"

"My dad works at the police station. My mum should be at downtown evacuation. I was going to go look for my dad and then we could go find my mum together. But now that you're here we could go get my mum then go to the police station." Jane gave an expectant look at Espi, but the woman's face dropped.

Jeremy walked over. "I don't really know how to put this, so I'll just say it. Downtown port was hit an hour. Everyone was either off world, taken to the PD, or was killed." Jane looked down too. She wasn't good at maths, not at all, but she knew even though a third wasn't as big as two, it was still big.

"Hey cheer up, I'm sure your mum made it. After all, she does have you to look after. We're on our way to the PD as well, so we'll take you along. No one gets left behind, right Jeremy?"

"Course. Except the rest of the squad."

"Don't worry, man. I'm sure they're dipping ginger biscuits in mocha right now, and making fun of your accent." Espi looked at Jane again, and tucked a loose strand of bright red hair behind Jane's ear. She

then pulled the hood over her head, and put her own helmet on. "Oh, and," she handed Jane a pistol, making sure the safety was on. "You know how to use one of these?" Jane shook her head. Despite her dad being a police officer, he had strictly forbidden her from using them.

"Right, well, all you do is flick this down, and not shoot us or yourself. And only if you really need to. Don't want them to be able to harm you in any way." She put the large, heavy, M6D in Jane's deep jacket pocket, and tapped it. "You may get an overwhelming desire to take Jeremy out, but try to avoid it. I kind of need him alive. We're six blocks from the PD, but those are six occupied blocks. We're going to have to be sneaky. Can you do that?"

Jane nodded eagerly, knowing she could do anything for her parents. She saluted the woman with a smile. "Yes sir!"

"That's my girl. Let's go ladies."

"Oh, wait!" The two soldiers turned to her again. "I forgot Charlie in the changing room."

"Don't worry, I got 'im in my bag. You don't want to lose him do you?" Espi asked. Jane shook her head. "Didn't think so. Now let's get a move on."

Almost on cue, a large rumble shook through the street. The two marines suddenly had their hands on the sides of their helmets. _Colonel Williams... autho-... eat from PD bui-... _a long gap of static was heard. The marines were worried when all of a sudden a second rumble went through the street. _I repeat, this is Colonel Williams, I am hereby authorizing retreat from PD building. All units and civilians are ordered to move to the Chan Centre. This message will loop in five seconds_.

"Shi- I mean, doody. Chan Centre is like, two miles from here," Jeremy stated. "And why are they pulling back?"

"If that message is on repeat, and the last we heard from him was over an hour ago, that means those two explosions were jammers. It's been pretty quiet around here too. That could've been ordered the moment after the downtown info and we walked into the jammer radius. Who knows how long ago that message was issued."

"Yeah, what do they even want us at Chan for anyhow."

A sudden burst of inspiration came to Jane's head. "Mum!" The two marines were surprised by the outburst. "Mum used to work there and she said that once she got to go to it's built in infirmary."

"Not bad. Not bad at all kid. We got a lot of ground to cover now, so we'd best get moving. No more interruptions. Got it?" Jeremy asked.

They all nodded and moved out of the shop, into a snow and body filled city, with half a plan, two mediocre skilled marines, and a small girl with no weapons training.

* * *

><p>So, yeah. This is my new story. It won't be like those other ones where the UNSC is suddenly the Alliance and BFF's 4ever with the Elites. It's only been thirty years, not nearly long enough to upgrade every remaining ship, or to create a fleet of pre-war size (Which I believe was something like 2000 ships). Only the largest ships the UNSC has will have energy weapons and shields.

****And ONI will not be some supreme force of intelligence. ONI is known for oft fucking up everything, and they are not likely to change, considering how Glasslands and Thursday War have described them.****

****The marines haven't all got shields, and energy weapons. Yeah, you might see some in later chapters, but thirty years seriously is not long enough. As for why a colony has interceptors and dedicated marines, I'll include that next chapter.****

****And as for my other stories, I can't be bothered, so if you want 'em, PM me and let me know.****

End
file.